



Otago
Regional
Council

Strategic Directions

2024–2034



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Strategic Directions 2024–2034

Our **Strategic Directions 2024–2034** has been developed taking into consideration both global and local trends, including (but not limited to):

- Effects of the changing climate on our region’s indigenous biodiversity, our ability to grow food, and the intensity and frequency of storm and flood events;
- Environmental degradation, decreasing access to freshwater and other pressures on natural resources, which is set to increase;
- Inflation driven by geopolitical instability, overseas conflicts, rising energy prices, a tight labour market and the ongoing effects of Covid-19;
- Effects on our region’s businesses through changing consumer preferences;
- Opportunities provided through technological innovation, increased digital connectivity, and changes to the way we work;
- Benefits from strengthening our partnership with mana whenua;
- A change in government, RMA reform, water services reform, and other changes from central government.

With all this in mind, Council has redefined our vision for Otago:

Our environment and communities are healthy and connected ki uta ki tai (from the mountains to the sea).

Our ambition is to make significant progress towards realising our vision over the next 10 years by aligning our work programmes with six focus areas. We have set goals for each focus area, which allows us to arrange and prioritise our work to ensure our aspirations are fulfilled.

The schematic below shows how our partnership with mana whenua and our communities sit across and underpin all the work that we do in the Resilience, Climate, Transport and Environment focus areas.

Our vision for Otago



We are already making good progress towards achieving some of these goals, but for others further resources may need to be allocated. We can't do this on our own, and so we will be drawing on support from within and beyond our organisation and the Otago region to ensure we have the right teams assembled to address specific challenges and opportunities. Effective collaboration and relationship management will, therefore, be key to making this possible.

Over the next 10 years, we will be monitoring progress towards achieving our Goals and adjusting our work programmes accordingly. Being agile in our approach will be important to ensure we can respond to changing circumstances and/or new challenges and opportunities.

Our Strategic Directions will be updated in three years' time in preparation for the 2027-2037 Long-term Plan.





ORC focus areas





Partnership

Aspiration

Otago Regional Council has effective and meaningful partnerships with mana whenua, creating better outcomes for our region.

Toitū te marae a Tane-Mahuta

Toitū te marae a Takaroa

Toitū te takata

'If the land is well, if the sea is well, the people will thrive'.

Why this is important

Strengthening and deepening the partnership with mana whenua is a key priority for ORC. This means incorporating more mātauraka Māori and customary knowledge into our decision making and processes and building greater connectivity between policy, planning and environmental outcomes. We are committed to continuing our journey to work more closely and effectively with mana whenua in both our strategic and operational work. This will help embed our shared aspiration of using multigenerational, holistic-systems-thinking to create positive outcomes for Otago's environment and communities. The partnership sits across all we do; it provides the ability to address complex challenges, share responsibilities, access expertise and resources, foster community engagement and implement coordinated approaches to governance and decision making.

Our role

Our role as a regional council includes:

- Partnering with mana whenua and ensuring mātauraka Kāi Tahu is an integral part of decision making.
- Working in partnership with mana whenua by engaging in consultation, co-management agreements, and participation in council processes while considering cultural impacts and fulfilling Treaty settlement obligations.
- Supporting the intention of the Crown to uphold the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi as prescribed in local government and treaty settlement legislation.
- Work with mana whenua and other parties to align aspirations in our work programmes through Mana to Mana and work through priorities and trade-offs.
- Work with and through Aukaha and Te Ao Mārama Inc (the Papatipu Rūnaka consultancy services, Aukaha, representing Kāi Tahu ki Otago, and Te Ao Mārama Inc, representing Ngāi Tahu ki Murihiku), to provide a first point of contact and to facilitate engagement in resource management processes.
- Ensure mana whenua are resourced to actively participate in development, design and decision making.

Goals

1

Te Ao Māori concepts of intergenerationally and deeply connected systems are incorporated throughout Council's work programmes.

2

Mātauraka Māori and the principle of te mana o te wai are incorporated into our environmental planning, management, and decision making.

3

We always go above and beyond our statutory responsibilities (as prescribed in local government and treaty settlement legislation) to support the intention of the Crown to uphold the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi / The Treaty of Waitangi.

Communities

Aspiration

Otago has cohesive and engaged communities that are connected to the environment and each other.

Why this is important

We are facing a range of significant trends that present challenges for our communities. These include challenges around inequality, social division and a lack of trust in public institutions. Our communities are at the heart of our decision making and our work. There is opportunity to reconnect and improve how we engage with our communities, to ensure they feel listened to, and to support them to better interact and engage with one another.

Our role

Our role as a regional council includes:

- Promoting the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of communities in the present and for the future. To do this we manage the natural environment, carry out regional land transport planning, regional emergency management and civil defence preparedness, and manage harbour navigation and safety.
- Providing leadership in communication, coordination and collaboration throughout the region in relation to the work that we do.
- Leading projects and work programmes, facilitating collaborative initiatives, providing education and regularly connecting with groups across the region.
- Seeking input, feedback, and guidance from the community through formal and informal processes to inform Council decision-making and other activities.
- Being satisfied, when making decisions, that we know sufficient information and have considered the views and preferences of the affected and interested parties in our communities.
- Reporting on our activities and achievements.

Goals

1 Our communities trust us, and they are satisfied with us and the outcomes that we are delivering.

2 Our communities are supported and empowered to achieve better environmental outcomes.

3 The social, cultural, economic, and environmental wellbeing of Otago is consistently improving.



Environment

Aspiration

Otago has a healthy environment ki uta ki tai (from mountains to the sea), including thriving ecosystems and communities, as well as flourishing biodiversity.

Why this is important

Otago’s environment is facing challenges around water quality and availability, soil and air quality, soil erosion and run-off, biodiversity loss, biosecurity threats and impacts on the coastal environment. We recognise the need to protect our diverse environments and that the wellbeing of our communities — including mana whenua — is dependent on strong connections with the natural environment. A healthy environment is also important for our economy. We need to protect, manage and use our natural resources in a planned and considered way with future generations always in mind.

Our role

Our role as a regional council includes:

- Playing a lead role in environmental management across the region to ensure we are passing on a healthy environment to future generations.
- Developing and implementing policies and legislation that focus on managing the effects of using freshwater, land, air and coastal water.
- Undertaking regulatory activities that protect Otago’s environment and communities.
- Collecting, analysing and reporting on a range of environmental data, and making that data publicly accessible.
- Enabling healthy biodiversity through collaboration with landowners, communities and industry.
- Helping create well-functioning urban environments alongside our region’s district councils.
- Providing advocacy, education and collaboration to support improved environmental management.
- Predicting and addressing emerging environmental issues before they arise through (amongst other things) investment in emerging technology.

Goals

1 Ecosystems are healthy, our water and air are clean, and biodiversity loss is arrested across the region.

2 We predict and address emerging environmental issues before they arise.

3 Our regional plans are effective at ensuring our resources are managed in a planned and considered way.



Resilience

Aspiration

Otago builds resilience in a way that contributes to community and environmental wellbeing through planned and well-managed responses to shocks and stresses, including natural hazards.

Why this is important

Otago continues to be at risk from a broad range of natural hazards. These include geological, hydrological, meteorological and biological hazards. Of these, Otago is most likely to be affected by storms, floods, drought, wildfires, landslides, river erosion, coastal erosion (including effects of sea level rise), pandemic, earthquakes and tsunamis. Resilience is defined as the capacity and ability to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions. In our context, resilience also includes planning for unexpected events and supporting the wellbeing of our communities in adverse times.

We need to work on the principle that ‘prevention is better (and often less expensive) than cure’ because the range of available options is usually more limited following a natural hazard event.

Our role

Our role as a regional council includes:

- Providing co-ordinated civil defence emergency management (CDEM) and planning for reduction, readiness, response and recovery as part of the region’s CDEM group.
- Continuously expanding our knowledge and understanding about natural hazards and their impacts, and acting as a central repository and conduit for the development and sharing of both current and future-focussed information relating to natural hazards.
- Ensuring that regional policies and plans are forward looking and include mechanisms to manage the effects of activities that could adversely affect Otago’s resilience.
- Fostering system-level relationships that enable us to connect with the right people in the right places to represent our environment and communities in any responses.

- Managing our flood protection and drainage schemes, including maintaining flood banks and managing pump stations and flood warning systems across the region.
- Ensuring that our citizens are educated, knowledgeable and empowered to mitigate for, respond to, and recover from unexpected events.
- Ensuring that our internal plans and systems are fit for purpose to support employee health, safety and wellbeing during and following natural hazard events.
- Budgeting for increased costs associated with planning for and responding to natural hazards and repairing damage.

Goals

1 Plans are in place to ensure that the region’s most vulnerable communities (geographic and demographic) and ecosystems are resilient in the face of natural hazards.

2 Our infrastructure is designed and built to accommodate variability and uncertainty associated with changing weather patterns and sea level rise.

3 Our Regional Policy Statement and regional plans control development in areas that are vulnerable to natural hazards.

Climate

Aspiration

Otago is a climate-resilient region that plans for and invests in initiatives that reduce emissions and help us adapt to our changing climate.

Why this is important

Otago will continue to be impacted by the effects of climate change. Our region is particularly vulnerable to flooding, coastal erosion, water quality issues, wildfire and droughts. Resulting issues are wide ranging: changes to the climate are impacting how land can be used and what crops can be grown; hydrological system changes are putting pressure on our communities; biodiversity is at risk; natural hazard events are increasing in frequency and intensity; and consumer choices are changing, affecting our businesses. Climate change is a worldwide issue requiring action at regional and local levels. We know that we can't fix climate change, but we can reduce its impacts and we have a responsibility to do so for future generations. We need to lead and coordinate in this space.

Our role

Our role as a regional council includes:

- Taking a leadership role to help our communities and economy to decrease emissions and to help ensure our region is contributing to the achievement of national targets for mitigation.
- Looking ahead and obtaining the best information so that we understand and work with new realities.
- Playing a critical role in climate adaptation by incorporating climate change considerations into everything we do.
- Ensuring that we have climate strategies, policies and plans in place so that we are well placed to anticipate and adapt to climate change.

Goals

1

The carbon footprint of our organisation is reduced in line with our climate change strategy, and we are supporting and collaborating with others to do the same.

2

Climate change mitigation and adaption are key considerations in all our decisions.

3

Our agriculture and horticulture systems are more climate resilient in the face of changing weather patterns, water availability and consumer choice.



Transport

Aspiration

Otago has an integrated transport system that contributes to the accessibility and connectivity of our community, reduces congestion and supports community wellbeing aspirations.

Why this is important

We anticipate that modes of transport need to change (e.g. shift to public transport, cycling and walking) for environmental and wellbeing reasons. Most of the region, however, does not have public transport services and uptake of active modes of transport is variable. Disparities between our rural and urban environments, coupled with our geographical spread, present challenges; regional connectivity remains a priority for our community and our economy. There is an opportunity to lead a shift in across our transport system to deliver a service our community is proud of and that supports our transition to low-emissions transport.

Our role

Our role as the regional council includes:

- Coordinating the preparation of a regional land transport plan.
- Planning for (and implementing) the extension of our Public Transport service.
- Funding and delivering public transport services (including marketing and communications, ticketing and fare setting).
- Designing and delivering initiatives that contribute to accessibility and connectivity within communities.

*We also own Port Otago Limited, which is considered to be regionally significant infrastructure.

Goals

1 Congestion is reduced and connection is increased throughout the region.

2 Carbon emissions are reduced and air quality is improved across the region, supported by our public transport services.

3 Active transport is the preferred mode for short journeys in urban areas.



Wellbeing Outcomes

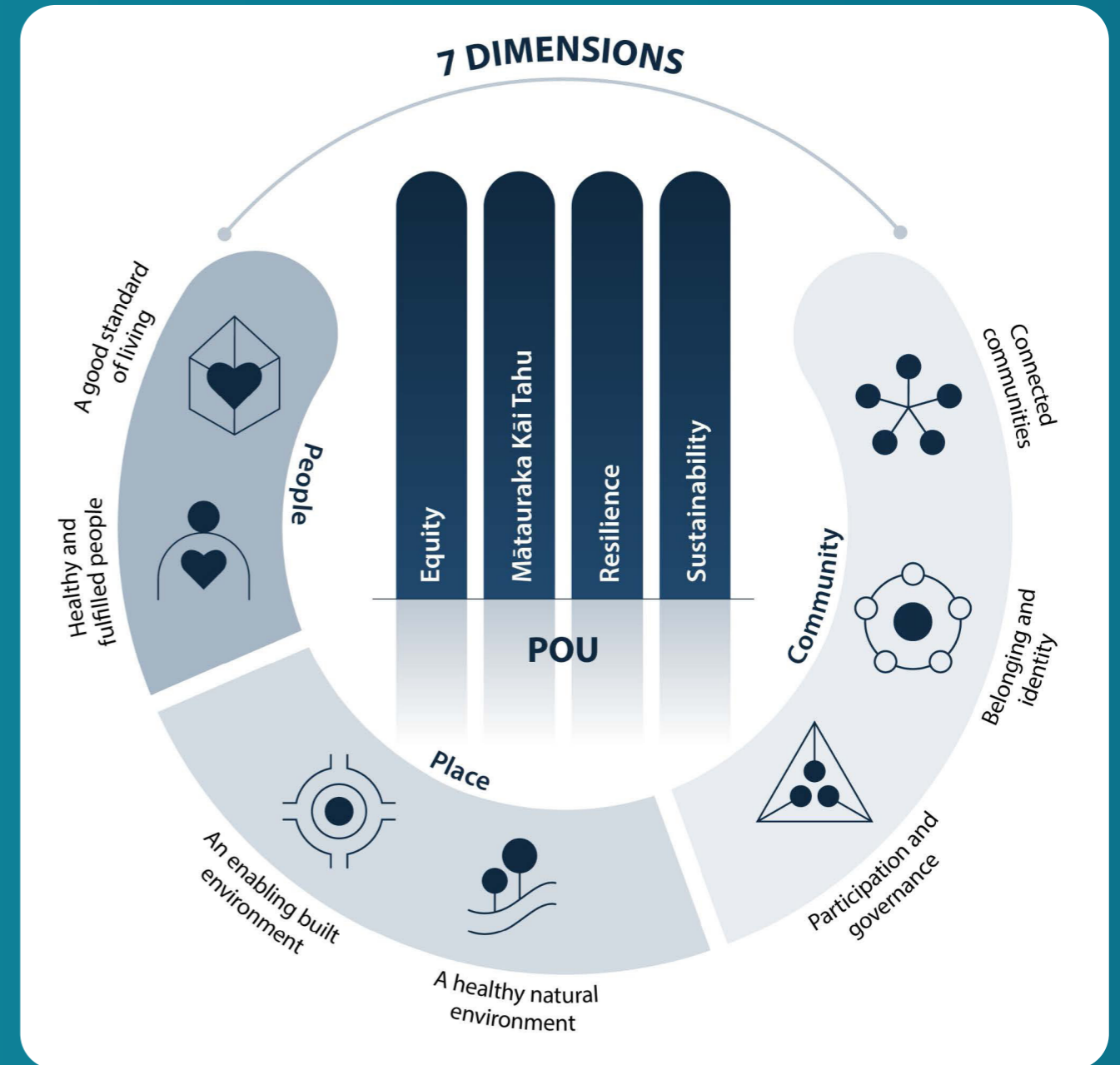
Promoting the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of our communities in the present and for the future is central to everything that we do.

So that we could better understand regional wellbeing issues, consider our role, and take any appropriate actions, we initiated a programme of work in 2022 to develop a Regional Wellbeing Framework for Otago. This was a collaborative process with input from mana whenua, the region's five district councils, Southern District Health Board, Ministry for Social Development, and many others. Seven integral dimensions for wellbeing were identified through this process, along with four pou (principles) that sit across these. This is illustrated in the diagram on the opposite page.

Public sector agencies, mana whenua, businesses, NGOs and civil society all have pivotal roles to play in improving collective wellbeing. The Regional Wellbeing Framework identifies a clear set of overarching wellbeing priorities that transcend individual agencies and departments. Although many important aspects of wellbeing are outside the scope of ORC's core activities, these can still be affected indirectly by what we do or can have implications for decisions made by Council.

The Regional Wellbeing Framework will enable us to systematically scan potential impacts across all relevant wellbeing outcomes. Doing so will help us to identify opportunities whereby actions in one wellbeing area can create positive feedback loops that support the objectives in other wellbeing areas, and mitigate risks where well-intended actions in one domain may trigger problems in other domains.

More information about our Wellbeing Framework and annual wellbeing reports can be found on our website. We will continue to undertake reporting on the region's wellbeing and work with key parties to identify options for responding to issues arising, either as individuals or through collaborative action.





What next?

Our ambition is to make significant meaningful progress towards realising our vision over the next 10 years by aligning our work programmes with the six focus areas and goals described in this document.

We will deliver this through existing strategies, new initiatives and activity work plans as a regional provider of:

- Engagement;
- Regulatory functions;
- Information and advice;
- Service delivery; and
- Direct support.

Achieving all of this will be an ambitious undertaking. We will need to address challenges, including (but by no means limited to):

- Limited capacity of our natural environment;
- Finite natural resources;
- The implications of climate change;
- Different issues across our diverse region;
- Increased inequality in certain areas;
- Balancing expectations of both national and local stakeholders.

We will be monitoring progress towards achieving our goals and adjusting our work programmes accordingly. Being agile in our approach will be important to ensure we and those working alongside us can respond to changing circumstances and/or new challenges and opportunities.

Our Strategic Directions will be updated in three years' time in preparation for the 2027–2037 Long-term Plan.

